RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Community Organizing Method from the US to Europe: Similarities, Differences, and Challenges Ahead

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ABSTRACT: The approach of Community Organizing to building and empowering local communities has become increasingly popular in the last decades, both because of the past involvement in community organizing of popular personalities such as Barack Obama, and because of the crisis of more traditional practices of civil society building. The main promoter of this approach worldwide is today the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), based in Chicago, which was founded in 1940 by Saul D. Alinsky, who has also systematized the main principles of community organizing. Thanks to IAF activity, since the 1990s, the community organizing method has also spread to western Europe, first in the UK and Germany, and later in several other countries. After sketching the history and methodology of the broad-based community organizing approach adopted by the IAF, this paper will try to analyze the community organizing initiatives developed in Western Europe during the last 30 years under the supervision of (or inspired by) the Industrial Areas Foundation network, singling out the main problems and issues at stake in adopting and translating the method outside the US, in different social, political and cultural contexts. The analysis will be based both on semi-structured interviews with several US- and Europe-based organizers and on the participant observation carried out since 2019, during the development of a community organizing initiative in the city of Turin, in northern Italy.

KEYWORDS: community organizing, Europe, civil society, mobilization, comparative politics

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1. Introduction[1]

The past decades have seen an increasing amount of research on old and new approaches pursuing grassroots action for social change throughout the world (Diani and McAdam 2003; Sirianni and Friedland 2001). Among them, one of the most popular (especially since the election of Barack Obama, who praised his experience as an organizer in Chicago in his autobiography (Obama 2004), is the community organizing (insofar CO) approach: a method that works on the associational and relational networks already in place in civil society, investing in a renovation process that could be beneficial to all of the participants engaged. CO relies on natural forms of aggregation among individuals with the aim of achieving enough power to pursue some level of change in their local context. The idea of acting together is not anchored to just one specific issue but refers to multiple local issues, such as housing, transportation, security, health, employment, and education. The practice, the investigations, and the collective actions are ultimately destined to achieve changes in those policies regarding local issues of mutual concern (Christens and Speer 2015).

Although ante litteram CO has characterized human action all over history, it has been consciously formed into a method as such only in the 1930s. Saul D. Alinksy has been the one that turned CO into a method and founded in Chicago the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) which over the years became the main platform to promote the approach worldwide.

Although other significant institutions promoting CO, both in the US and abroad, exist or have existed (among them, the Gamaliel Foundation, PICO/Faith in Action, ACORN, Leading Change Network and the Midwest Academy) (Schutz and Miller 2015), this paper will mainly focus on the IAF tradition and methodology, by analyzing an understudied subject in the international literature on CO: the diffusion of this methodology abroad. The paper will particularly focus on western Europe, where IAF-supervised CO initiatives have spread since the 1990s, first in the UK and Germany, and later in other countries.

These latter initiatives will be the main focus of this paper, which will describe the main IAF-supervised (or -inspired) projects in western Europe, and try to analyze the main differences and issues at stake in transplanting a methodology elaborated in the US in European contexts marked by different social, political and cultural institutions and traditions.

The first section of the paper is an introduction to the origins of CO and its main principles, and their evolution from the Alinsky era to the post-Alinsky IAF. The following section will describe the development of IAF-inspired CO initiatives in western Europe. The third section will review the main issues and problems at stake in the development of these projects, particularly the possible shortcomings when trying to adopt, and adapt, the broad-based CO methodology to the European context. The concluding remarks of the paper will finally try to understand what are the perspectives for the spreading and development of this method in Europe, and what adaptations are needed for that.

2. Sources and methodology

The paper is based on a project carried out at the University of Turin from January 2019 to September 2022, during which a CO initiative was developed in the northern periphery of the city of Turin, in northwest Italy. These activities were carried out between 2019 and 2020 thanks to funds provided by a local bank foundation, and in 2021 and 2022 thanks to funds provided by the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society of the University of Turin, and the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. This last part of the project, which developed an exchange programme between CO initiatives in Italy, Germany and the Netherlands, also with the participation of undergraduate students, proved particularly relevant for the development of this paper, because it permitted an exchange of ideas and good practices with CO practitioners and researchers from other EU countries. In this context, marked by an applied research perspective, the authors of this paper played respectively the roles of project supervisor, and organizer/researcher.

The main aim of the research was to test the IAF CO methodology on the neighborhoods of the northern periphery of Turin, in order to verify its applicability to an Italian and European case, marked by political, social and cultural differences in comparison with the US contexts where the method was created and developed. Therefore, while trying to correctly implement the IAF methodology (also thanks to the supervision of a senior IAF-affiliated organizer), a critical attitude was maintained throughout the project, as a consequence of the main research question.

Throughout the development of the project, all the people involved (both civil society leaders and other organizers) were consistently informed that the University of Turin was carrying out a research project. However, to maintain a sounder wall of separation between the parts of the project involving civil society-centered activities and the formal research ones, the authors also decided to carry out (between November 2021 and July 2022) 12 semi-structured interviews with senior organizers of the IAF network (or, in a few cases, organizers with an IAF training who had later chosen to adopt partly different methodologies), both US- and Europe-based. As a consequence, all the quotations included in the paper are drawn from these formal interviews, although the conclusions are the result of the much wider experience developed by the authors thanks to the activities and the exchange of ideas carried out throughout the development of the project.

3. The State of the Art

Since its creation in its present form by Alinsky in the 1940s, the CO approach has been the subject of a wide literature. For a global review of this latter, which goes beyond the scope of the present paper, see: Christens and Speer, 2015; and Schutz and Miller, 2015. This paragraph will, in a more focused perspective, analyze the literature on CO in relation to the three specific fields which are the subject of the analysis carried out in the second part of this paper: CO, the state, and civil society; the idea of power in CO; and the role of religion in CO.

The peculiar outlook of the IAF CO approach towards public institutions and civil society has been the subject of a number of contributions, which evaluate it in critical perspective, especially in relation to its focus on civil society and the rejection of any direct involvement in electoral politics. Beck and Purcell (2013), for example, compare Alinsky's model to other approaches, such as Antonio Gramsci's ideas of hegemony and counter-hegemony, and Paulo Freire's idea of building critical consciousness, concluding that while the former is very productive in terms of issues identification and people mobilization – particularly to address race and class injustices (Franklin, 2014) – it is less effective in developing broader critical thinking and political movements.

While, indeed, the literature is generally appreciative of the grassroots IAF approach involving groups "working together to address state policy" (Warren, 2010, p. 142), the problem of how to upscale CO initiatives to play a role in the broader political discussion has always indeed been a sore issue for Alinsky and the subsequent IAF leaders themselves (Horwitt, 1992; Warren, 1998; Gecan, 2004). According to Swarts, for example, boundaries such as those between CO initiatives and politicians, although effective in empowering members, were partly "developed in relation to conditions that no longer exist" (Swarts, 2011, p. 473) and therefore they need an update, which some organizations in the US are indeed trying to carry out. According to the author, this is also necessary to overcome the barrier between CO and movements, preventing a more systemic action on issues such as health care, housing, and financial reform: which might require not only broader collaborations, but also an integration of different organizing models (Schutz and Sandy, 2012).

The discussion on the role of power is also a crucial issue in CO, considering that probably the main innovation brought about by Alinsky (1946, 1971) in comparison to other approaches to community development and social work was indeed a new consideration of the importance of grassroots-based power and citizens' empowerment. The necessary relation between the empowerment of individual organization members and the development of power for community organizations is indeed pointed out by Speer and Hughey in a classical contribution on the subject (Speer and Hughey, 1995). This link is particularly relevant for the post-Alinsky IAF approach to CO, considering the latter's emphasis on 'relational power' (Chambers, 2018). The role of relationality in CO has also been analyzed in gendered perspective, in terms of women's involvement in CO initiatives, in comparison to an alleged male-dominated 'institutional' Alinsky approach (Stall and Stoecker, 1998): an issue which is particularly crucial in faith-based organizations (Garlington et al., 2019). As for the nature of the power developed by CO initiatives, Ozzano and Fenoglio contend that their actions can be particularly effective because they use "a 'smart' mix of different types of influence, ranging from bottom-up campaigns and political pressures to the use of economic boycotts and incentives to more "soft" forms of influence and moral suasion" (Ozzano and Fenoglio, 2022, p. 14), where the role of religion often comes to the fore.

In relation to the latter factor, a huge literature exists, first of all on the so-called faith-based or congregation-based CO, solely relying on religious institutions, organizations and groups for the organizing effort, as well as the crucial role played by religious actors in broad-based CO initiatives such as those implemented by the IAF-related network. On this topic, a milestone was a survey carried out by Mark R. Warren and Richard L. Wood (2001), which, reviewing faith-based CO initiatives in the US, supported the idea that this wide network represented "a powerful contribution to American democracy" by developing local leadership, strengthening public life, and "shaping public policy that best meets community needs" (Warren and Wood, 2001, p. 3). In the following years, more research supported this idea, often with reference to the concept of 'social capital', proposed in the US by Robert Putnam (1994; see also Wood and Warren, 2002), by claiming that this activation model strengthens "both relationships within existing congregations and other member organizations (bonding social capital), while building relationships across different social organizations (bridging social capital)" (Beyerlein and Hipp, 2006, p. 363; Jones, 2015), also in relation to religious minorities (Fulton, 2018). In opposition to the faith-based initiatives of service providing supported by some Republican administrations since the 2000s, some authors also claim that faith-based CO is a more effective tool for the empowerment of low-wage and marginalized communities (Wood and Warren, 2002). As a whole, the literature makes a quite positive assessment of the phenomenon, and possible critical points are highlighted not in relation to the model itself, but only to factors such as the problems in 'upscaling' the model at the national level, or the risk that public administrations exploit CO networks as service providers (Rusch, 2012; Christens and Speer, 2015). As

for the dangers posed by faith-based organizing, Bretherton highlights three main risks: being co-opted by governments, falling into a conflict-ridden communalist perspective, and commodification in a neoliberal perspective (Bretherton, 2012; Shannahan, 2013).

4. Features of community organizing

The model of engagement that is known as CO aims at reenergizing local communities by training people within local organizations and institutions to take responsibility through concrete actions aimed at solving the problems that affect their territory. The goal is to make people responsible for improving their condition as citizens. In other words, "community organizing is people in civil society acting intentionally in concert with others to change their lives, powered and guided by their own interests and values" (Cowan 2018, x).

The crucial aspects of this approach are the community and the practice of organizing. The concept of "community" relies on the shared interests among its members as part of a defined territory, and on the strength of the relational connections among them. Moreover, the community reference also refers to the concept of common good and the possibility and capacity for ordinary people to have a place in public life decision making processes. The systemic challenges that are meant to be addressed could not be solved by the only action of individuals but rather by "the collaborative action [of] organized citizens" (Chambers 2003). Since the focus is on the strengthening of the relational bond, the level of agreement on the interests doesn't need to be absolute or focused on a specific topic but it is rather important to pursue the principles of plurality and inclusiveness. Therefore members can vary from faith institutions to universities, schools, unions, and various types of (formal and informal) community groups and associations. The starting point is often the local territory since all the stakeholders involved share the same space whatever their individual motives and drives. Nonetheless, the reference here is to a particular kind of community, the political community. Luke Bretherton uses the term "community of fate" by which he means

> that in a world city you do not choose either whom you live next door to or who lives in the next block or neighbourhood. You find yourself living in proximity with people from whom you may be very different, whether individually or collectively. They may speak a world very differently. But whether one likes it or not, one shares the same fate as them. If the electricity loses power, if gangs rule the streets, everyone is under threat (Bretherton 2015, 86).

Working with groups living in proximity and sharing a common fate, the CO approach aims at strengthening the institutions of civil society and their ability to act together to achieve concrete change making each other accountable.

The process is based on the idea of comparing the world as it is to the world as it should be, therefore aiming at a democracy whose participation in public life is based on a greater recognition of all people as equal. According to the CO approach, the community itself must take action and has the responsibility to define together the goals to pursue, due to being the best stakeholder and know-how provider. In order to build a sustainable change it is mandatory to have previously acquired the ability to collectively act through the organization, development and education of the leaders of the community. It is a process that takes a certain amount of time before the start of an action: indeed, the IAF approach to organizing believes that, if the actions

start too soon and without enough power to change the roots of the issue that made people move in the first place, it risks resulting in a critical waste of energy and deep frustration.

The second aspect is the practice of organizing, considered as an ongoing cycle of disorganizing and reorganizing or in other words as a continuum of research, action, and evaluation (Chambers 2003). In this context, a crucial role is played by the organizer, a paid activist (possibly funded through dues paid by local associations and groups) who acts as a catalyst of network creation and action activation. The organizing cycle aims at the creation of a broad-based community organization including as many local actors as possible. The tools put into practice include, among the main ones: deep and active listening, relations and community building, leaders development, broad listening campaigns for the analysis of collective issues to tackle, power analysis and collective actions planning, and, finally, a reflective and peer to peer learning phase (Gecan 2004).

Especially since the late 20th century, after Alinsky's death, the activity of organizing largely relied on the relational element, and especially the practice of "relational meeting". This method, also known as "one-to-one", became the core element of the entire process in the 1970s-80s, and it is more than merely meeting another person. This practice is about developing that relational power that goes beyond the traditional dynamics in a relationship, it is about developing power "with" the others not "over" the others (Gecan 2004, Loomer 1976). As stated by the former IAF national director Ed Chambers ''power takes place in relationships'' (Chambers 2003, p. 28).

Relational meetings differ from other forms of social practices or survey techniques for gathering data; it rather serves the purpose of scouting potential leaders while discovering and deepening the motives and the dreams of change of the people. Edward Chambers (2003) defines it as "the most radical thing that we teach" and summarizes its main characteristics as follow:
- It aims at developing a public (not private or friendly) relation
- It applies selectively, only to community leaders, but disregarding any ethnic, religious or class barriers
- It requires an intentional conversation lasting between 30 and 45 minutes
- It requires a focus on the values and points of view of the other, with a measure of vulnerability on both sides (also considering that the idea is to probe and, to a measure, agitate the other) in order to find a common ground

One of the main differences between organizing and other forms of political activism is that in organizing people speak for themselves instead of speaking on behalf of other social groups. The aim of organizing is to ensure that ordinary people, such as workers, students and residents, can exercise effective power in their daily lives. This means that CO focuses on building people's capacity and confidence to face the challenges they face and advance their demands. Furthermore, organizing differs from social work in the sense that it is not limited to direct service to people, but aims to create collective power that can influence political and institutional dynamics. The ultimate goal of organizing is to increase the influence of the civic sector and to promote systemic changes in society.

In summary, the main features of CO include the development of local leadership, the empowerment of ordinary people to exercise power effectively, and the emphasis on building collective power to influence institutions and political dynamics.

The inclusiveness principle of the IAF approach to CO is evident in its broad-based connotation, meaning including and getting along with groups and individuals, with families, churches, synagogues, and other cultural groups, with the intent of including the multiple nature of the community taken into consideration (Schutz and Miller 2015). Therefore, it would have a multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-interest composition that - according to the IAF - grants the sustainability of the approach itself without following the waves of interest of the specific member institutions. Secular and religious member institutions would work together and they would also be responsible for the very funding of the organization. This is based on the idea that "power tends to come in two forms: organized people and organized money" (Schutz and Miller 2015). As a matter of fact, in the IAF network the membership is dues-based: which is fundamental for maintaining the organizations' independence, and as such, they try not to reflect any political preference and they do not accept public funding. This approach is different from that of other CO approaches, such as ACORN's, which is more ideologically driven and selective in relation to participants.

The broad-based IAF approach to CO is also different from purely faith-based or congregation-based CO as practiced by groups like PICO-Faith in Action and Gamaliel Foundation (for a review of the different approaches, see Schutz and Miller 2015), which solely rely on faith-based institutions and groups to develop a local coalition. However, this does not mean that religion does not play a role in the IAF-inspired strategies. On the contrary, churches and faith-based groups are an essential part of their organizing effort. This was already true at the time of Alinsky's first efforts in Chicago, when the involvement of Catholic parishes and, particularly, of the local Catholic hierarchies was crucial for the legitimization of the organizers' role in the neighborhoods (Horwitt 1992). Alinsky mainly perceived the role of religion - in line with his general approach to society - in very pragmatic terms, both because organized religion represented a relevant part of Chicagoan civil society, and because the sacred was a crucial factor in the worldview of the people he wanted to involve. For this reason, he instructed his organizers to become acquainted with the religious beliefs and traditions of the people they wanted to organize and be respectful towards them (Alinsky 1946 and 1971).

It was however after Alinsky's death, that an upgrade of the role of religion in the IAF organizing effort took place, both because of the religious background of some of the new IAF leaders (first of all Ed Chambers) and because the IAF activity expanded towards areas inhabited by often deeply religious people, such as the Latinx immigrant communities of the Southwest. In this context, the IAF started to look at religion not simply in utilitarian and strategic terms, but as a source of values for the construction of local civil society coalitions, "to provide a set of value commitments to combine with practical self-interest" in order to build long-term campaigns (Warren 2001, pp. 57–58). The new IAF leadership saw religion as an essential part of the US democratic dream (Chambers 2003) and, for this reason, they also sort of democratized the role of organized religion itself, by moving beyond the simple involvement of religious leaders and directly involving lay religious people "from the ranks of parish councils, fund-raising committees, and churchgoers who were active in PTAs and social clubs" (Warren 2001, p. 50). This was particularly true, for example, in the case of the above-mentioned Hispanic communities, thanks to the work of organizers such as Ernesto Cortes. Religion was no longer, therefore, a matter of strategy and self-interest and became a tool for the involvement and the commitment of people with values to the wellbeing of their local community (Ozzano and Fenoglio 2022). For this reason, in the past few decades, religious leaders as well as lay faithful have often been at the forefront of IAF actions throughout the US, alongside secular civil society leaders (Wood 2002).

5. Community Organizing in the US and its development

Broad-based CO, as we know it today, originates in the life and work of Saul Alinsky, a Chicago-born researcher and activist, in the urban contexts of the USA. These experiences, and his original elaboration of the CO approach, are described in his two books Reveille for Radicals (1946) and Rules for Radicals (1971). However, as explained below, the theoretical level of elaboration in Alinsky's work was rather weak, and crucial planks of the current IAF approach to CO have been developed after Alinsky's death, happened in 1972, by IAF leaders such as Ed Chambers.

Between the late 19th and the early 20th century, the industrialized cities had shown many problems connected to urban life, especially for the working poor. This started to become a public issue and urged the emergence of new approaches able to address the specific issue of the conditions of life of the citizens in general, and the factory workers in particular. At the sociological level, this meant the need to develop a new field of research able to study and develop a broader understanding of the growing individual participation in the urban context and the deriving social transformation processes. At the time Chicago was a living laboratory where many specialists, such as Upton Sinclair, Robert Park, and Ernest Burgess, would develop their empirical research (Horwitt 1992).

In 1926, in this city of extremely strong intellectual presence, Alinsky started working as a sociologist at the University of Chicago where he attended a BA in Sociology and started to develop a deep interest in direct engagement with the people of the poor and marginalized communities. In Rules for Radicals he refers to the guiding star of the organizers: "the dignity of the individuals", and continues with a learning lesson,

> "when we respect the dignity of the people (we can't deny them their) elementary right to participate fully in the solutions of their own problems. Self-respect arises only out of people who play an active role in solving their own crises and who are not helpless, passive, puppet-like recipients of private or public services. To give people help, while denying them a significant part in the action, contributes nothing to the development of the individual. [...] It will not work" (Alinsky 1971, 123)

It was during his time working as a researcher that Alinsky started engaging in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, a poor and dilapidated Chicago neighborhood. The experiment that he started in 1939 looked like such an almost impossible challenge (Norden 1972), but it later became the main point of reference for formulating the principles of CO as we know it today. Here the first people's organization, known as the Back of the Yards Neighbourhood Council (BYNC) was created: a broad-based, multi-issues and grassroots association, "composed of the people themselves working through their own local organizations" (Alinsky 1946, p. 48).

The BYNC set the first example of Alinsky's approach highlighting the importance of active and direct participation from the local leaders at the community level. The learning opportunity that would derive from it becomes a crucial element of the democratic process, without which it would "simply [be] the substitution of one power group for another" (Alinsky 1971, p. 125). In the words of Horwitt, "the process of problem-solving, the active participation of ordinary people, was at least as important as the solutions or decisions themselves" (Horwitt 1992, p. 105).

After the success of BYNC and with the support of Bernard J. Sheil, Archbishop of Chicago, and John L. Lewis, president of the powerful trade union Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), Alinsky founded the

Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in 1940: that is, the first and main network of CO which can be considered as his enduring legacy. It was meant to be a hub for training new organizers and for spreading the experiment in other cities around the country (Belotti 2011, 36). During the years many activists trained by Alinsky became leaders in the American civil rights movements and in the students' movement, among them Fred Ross, Cesar Chavez, Nicholas von Hoffman, Lester Hunt, Edward Chambers, Bob Squires, Joe Villemas (Belotti 2011, 39; Slayton 1996). During the rise of the civil rights movement in the 60s, Alinsky's approach also gained new relevance in connection with minority and segregated communities.

The neighborhood of Woodlawn, again in Chicago, represented a milestone as the first CO experiment involving a black community and an example of concrete mobilization of black people for their rights. There, in 1960, a people organization was founded after two years of work and was named Temporary Woodlawn Organization (TWO). Another initiative involving the fight around racial issues was the project in Rochester (New York) where in 1965 a people's organization named FIGHT (Freedom, Integration, God, Honor, Today) was founded. This project was meant to dismantle the superficial perfection of the city, putting a new light on the condition of segregation and discrimination of black people and making Eastman Kodak accountable for its ethical responsibility as an enterprise.

When Alinsky suddenly died, in 1972, he was however also planning to address the white middle class, that "silent majority" where the power is, and to adopt wide and general issues, such as pollution, inflation, violence, and race, as a chance for action (Horwitt 1989, 534).

After Alinsky's death, a new leadership continued his work promoting the development of broad-based citizens' organizations. Ed Chambers and Richard Harmon pushed for "a modern IAF "moving to a professionalized role of the organizer, the institution of a National Training (10 days), and a strong effort in building relationships rooted in the local communities and among different organizations. The main challenge that Chambers and the rest of the IAF staff had to go through was the development of a "modern IAF", able to thrive in the new historical conditions and to develop professional organizers.

This new phase took place in a favorable condition for a general reflection on the approach itself in order to address the criticisms that had already emerged in the past decades and implement solutions suitable to the changes in society. The first main change was a new focus on the relational dimension. As Chambers reports in his book Roots for radicals: organizing for power, action, and justice, it was during his time working in Chicago during the 1950s and the 1960s that he and Dick Harmon

> crafted the art of the relational meeting in the streets and taught it to organizers in Saul Alinsky's training institute. Saul's way of organizing, which we had inherited, was influenced by electoral politics and the CIO labor organizing of John L. Lewis. In this approach, where one person equals one vote and all votes are equal, the ability to mobilize large numbers of people is the key. Under Alinsky, organizing meant "pick a target, mobilize, and hit it.". In the modern IAF, it's "connect and relate to others." Issues follow relationships. You don't pick targets and mobilize first; you connect people in and around their interests. (Chambers 2003, 37).

The action of organizers also started to get a new relational focus, with the development and the extensive use of the tool - described above - of the "relational meeting" or "one-to-one", which became the core of the organizers' action in the neighborhoods.

Along with the relational focus, the IAF started to invest much more effort in the identification and professionalization of the role of organizers, through specific and formal training. The 10 days National Training is a deep leadership formation that has been implemented not just for the potential organizers but also for leaders that would like to further develop their capacities and skills and have a more active role in their communities. The training program is a formal combination of literature with practical instruction on how to assemble and organize civic power (Freedman 2015). Moreover, in the 1970s the IAF started hiring female organizers, something that Alinsky had never pursued, considering the career as made for men. Beside the gender-related correction, in the 1990s IAF also started to recruit and train leaders from different religious and ethnic backgrounds (Warren 2001).

Since the 1970s, new experiments of CO were spreading all over the country and the middle class had a growing role in them, as envisioned by Alinsky. Some of the most relevant organizations founded in those years are the East Brooklyn Congregations (New York), the "Nehemiah Homes" are its pioneer project in addressing the affordable housing problem; Baltimoreans United In Leadership Development - BUILD (Baltimore), which pioneered the first living wage campaign that was later followed also by other cities; the Queens Citizens Organization (New York); ONE Los Angeles (East Los Angeles); The Metropolitan Organization - TMO (Houston), and Communities Organized for Public Service - COPS (San Antonio)[2]. Particularly, the experience of COPS was the starting point for the engagement of Latino communities, which played a significant role in the spreading of the CO method, especially in the south-west[3]. Today the number of IAF affiliates both in the United States and internationally counts a total of sixty-five community organizations[4].

Finally, after the death of executive director Ed Chambers in 2015, the IAF network restructured its affiliation on a regional basis. Currently, the IAF network is led by two co-directors, Ernesto Cortes, Jr, and Mike Gecan, and the whole organization has been divided into two branches: "Metro IAF", on the east coast, and the "West-Southwest IAF".

6. Community Organizing in Western Europe

As shown above, the practices of CO have been developed in the North American socio-cultural and political landscape. Considering the differences between the US and the European contexts the question of whether this approach would suit the latter or not arises. This issue is particularly timely, considering that the CO approach has spread in Europe during the last 30 years, and particularly in the 2010s it has been rapidly expanding in Central, Eastern, and Western European countries. Different CO networks have become crucial in this process intending to support the new organizations. Among them are the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN International), the Leading Change Network, the European Community Organizing Network (ECON), and the IAF-related network (Schutz and Miller 2015). This paper, and particularly the following section, will mainly take into account the experiences that are affiliated - or at least loosely related - to the IAF network. Although CO initiatives exist in other countries, such as France, we have taken into account here only those European countries where these latter are more directly inspired by the IAF methods.

[2] History of IAF, https://www.industrialareasfoundation.org/history
[3] History of South West IAF, https://www.swiaf.org/history
[4] IAF organizations in the United States, https://www.industrialareasfoundation.org/affiliates

6.1 The United Kingdom

In the UK, Neil Jameson is recognized as the founder of Citizens UK since he promoted the British Citizens Organizing Foundation (COF) pilot project in 1989 (Warren 2009). A few years later, the first citizen alliance was officially founded in 1995, with the name The East London Citizens Organization, or TELCO (later re-named London Citizens). The CO initiatives later expanded across London and to other cities and a broader umbrella organization was created with the name Citizens UK. While the first organization had been created in East London, three more emerged in the North, West, and South sides of the city. Moreover, other community organizations were created in the north of England (Greater Manchester, Leeds, Leicester and Leicestershire, Nottingham, Peterborough, Preston, Birmingham, and Tyne and Wear), in the west (Cymru Wales, Thames Valley and Somerset), in the south (Brighton and Hove), and in the east such (Essex). As a whole, Citizens UK currently includes a network of 17 local civic alliances[5].

The local citizens' alliances represent thousands of leaders committed together to fight for sustainable and rooted change. Within the local alliances, there are over 450 civil society institutions creating a very diverse membership that is mostly dues-paying. The diverse and variegated membership represents the broad-based element of grassroots organizing, including multiple interests and interpretations of acting collectively (Balazard, 2012, 116-117). The current executive director of Citizens UK is Matthew Bolton, who was the lead organizer for the Living Wage campaign launched in 2001 in the UK: currently, it is still one of the strongest campaigns in the country.

Besides the Living Wage Campaign, there are other issues on which Citizens UK put an effort deciding to take concrete action: climate change, homelessness, housing, misogyny as a hate crime, parents and communities together, refugees and migrants welcome, and school-based counseling.

Despite the strong connections with the American-IAF culture of organizing, Citizens UK put less emphasis on the faith-based approach in building their membership, prioritizing instead a more secular perspective. This choice was made also because of structural differences in American and British societies. As explained by our interviewees working in the UK, while the first had strong religious institutions, the second was facing widespread weakness, loss of authority, and participation of local parishes. Regardless of the spread of other faith-based organizations, they have limited resources and before becoming full dues-paying members they need to strengthen themselves.

Nonetheless, in London, we can also find a peculiar religiously oriented initiative that is affiliated with Citizens UK, but remains autonomous: The Centre for Theology and Community. It is an ecumenical center started in 2009 with the name of Contextual Theology Centre and based in east London. Their mission is to provide local churches with tools to change their communities:

> CTC grew out of the work churches in London Citizens were already doing, and out of their desire to root this work more deeply in prayer and theological reflection. The questions we address therefore emerge directly from the practice of local communities, and their desire to be more faithful and more effective in their mission[6].

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[5] Citizens UK, Local Chapters, https://www.citizensuk.org/chapters/
[6] The Centre for Theology & Community, (theology-centre.org.uk)

The CTC approach is theological and it explores inclusive ways of exploring justice and faith together. For example, interviewee #10, an organizer and religious minister based in the UK, points out that "in East London, religious communities play a crucial role, it remains the case that it is where people meet to create association around particular values".

The CTC, therefore, was created as an attempt to create projects able to translate the experience of Catholic parishes in the US within the UK Protestant communities. It "encourages people of different faiths and cultures to deepen their engagement through social action and social interaction". Nonetheless, it also creates "space for people to learn the basis of community organizing even if you are not an organizer. It is important to develop life skills, learn how to be in relation with other people, listen to them, and build power" (Interviewee #12).

6.2 Germany

The German experience on CO builds on the experience of Leo J. Penta, a US-born Catholic priest who moved to Germany first as a researcher and, since 1996, as a professor at the Catholic University of Applied Sciences in Berlin. Based on his expertise as an organizer for the East Brooklyn Congregations, he started developing a German CO initiative in the German capital city. In 1999, the first CO initiative, named Organizing Schöneweide, took place in an east neighborhood of Berlin: "it first represented 16 groups shortly growing into 23 civil society organizations (schools, churches, clubs, social service agencies, and civic groups) with the opportunity to take action in designing their neighborhood. The main goal and success of this action was to move part of the campus of the Applied University of Technology and Business (FHTW) to a previously abandoned post-industrial area in Schöneweide.

In the following years, this experience expanded to other areas of the city, and in 2006 the German Institute for Community Organizing (Deutsches Institut für Community Organizing - DICO) was founded, also based on the pioneering work of the Forum on Community Organizing (FOCO), a research group created in 1993. The latter includes practitioners and researchers interested in spreading and developing CO practices and theories in the German context.

Currently, there are six bürgerplattforms (citizens' platforms) supported by DICO's network. One is the descendant of Organizing Schöneweide, which grew and changed its name into SO! MIT UNS Bürgerplattform Berlin-Südost. The others are: "WIR SIND DA!" Bürgerplattform Wedding/Moabit, founded in 2008 in Berlin; Bürgerplattform WIN – Wir in Neukölln, founded in 2012; Wir Bewegen Spandau, founded in 2018 in Berlin; Stark im Kölner Norden, active since 2015 in Cologne; and DUaktiv, in place since 2020 in Duisburg[7]. According to Leo Penta, the father of the organizing effort in Germany, "In September 2010, DICO reached a new level of recognition. It is no longer a question of whether organising is possible in Germany, but what place and role it will have long term in the development of democratic and politically active civil society there" (Penta 2011).

Besides the successful college relocation in the Schöneweide neighborhood, DICO's interests spread from unemployment, family doctors and general medical care, burial grounds for muslims and housing. The citizens' platforms represent very diverse local communities and people: in the words of the organizations, among

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[7] Source: https://www.communityorganizing.de/buergerplattformen-in-deutschland/berliner-buergerplattformen/

its members there are "germans, turkish, arab, asian, african, catholics, muslims, people without religion, men and women (with and without headscarves), young and old."[8]

6.3 The Netherlands

Since 2018 the IAF approach has also spread to the Netherlands, specifically the city of Amsterdam. The De Noort As is a pioneer local project developed and sustained by the Diaconie Noord (a Protestant institution). As told by interviewee #4, the actions started as a collective effort to fight poverty in the north neighborhood starting to promote a more strategically active approach going beyond the provision of services. Currently the main focus is the affordable housing issue in order to react to the gentrification processes spreading to the north area with consequent rise of rents. Those that were built as public houses for workers in the 1940s, instead of being renovated, are mostly being destroyed and rebuilt at higher prices.

The De Noort As group focuses on the power of stories of local people organizing meetings and providing insights both with policymakers and politicians working together on structural approaches for sustainable change. This experience is different from the traditional IAF one: there is no coalition - yet - including diverse associations, but a group of concerned individuals. It is a people-based organization due to its connection to the ACORN and the Leading Change Network experiences (LCN). Moreover the members are not due-paying members but the project is centrally funded by the Diaconie itself.

6.4 Italy

Italy's first connection with CO was related to the friendship between Alinsky and the French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, because of this latter's relationships within the Vatican and in particular with Giovanni Battista Montini (the future Pope Paul VI). As a consequence of this relation, during the late 1950s, Alinsky was invited to visit Italy with the intent of developing an "Italian Project" as part of an IAF strategy to create a "second front" in Europe (Finsk 1984).

During his visits to Milan and Rome Alinsky came into contact with Italian representatives from the Catholic Church, trade unions, and the Italian Communist Party. Alinksy's interest was at first mostly focused on the south of the country; nonetheless, after realizing the depth of the contextual misery and lack of resources, he decided to focus his effort on the industrialized cities of the north. The decision was made but the "Italian Project" was doomed to fail because of the deep conservatism and bureaucracy of the Vatican itself and the missed opportunity to meet with Adriano Olivetti and his group (Belotti 2011).

The Italian tradition on communitarianism, social work, and community action (Demaria 1957, Olivetti 1949, Zucconi 2015, Pazè 2004) since the 1960s has different points of connection with the organizing approach, and its development in the peninsula is characterized by the work of a number of influential figures. Some of the most representative are:
-   Adriano Olivetti (1901-1960), a northern Italian industrialist, who engaged in the attempt at building a new community with strong values and an emphasis on individuals and the relationships among them, in the context of a new model of industrial factory based on people rather than products.

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[8] DICO - Deutsches Institut für Community Organizing (dico-berlin.org)

- Aldo Capitini (1899-1968), whose expertise relied in the educational sector, referring to the concept of nonviolence as a methodology for action: "active nonviolence" therefore becomes both a mean of personal commitment and a project for social change (Capitini, 1967).
- Guido Calogero (1904-1986) and Maria Comandini (1903-1992), whose effort brought to the recognition in the aftermath of World War II of the need for a broader approach to individual integration and assistance with a focus on people's dignity and freedom. They contributed to the diffusion of social work in Italy among with the foundation of the first national school for social workers - CEPAS.
- Don Lorenzo Milani (1923-1967), a priest whose main contribution concerns the alphabetization and education of poor people. He considered the power of knowledge as a means of self-conscience and critical analysis. He was the founder of the Barbiana School for young farmers and factory workers in the countryside of Tuscany
- Danilo Dolci (1924-1997), whose approach is possibly the most similar to the IAF community organizing approach, especially considering his idea of power distinguishing the dominant approach from the relational one and the implementation of the "maieutic approach" to community development (Vigilante 2011). His effort was mostly based in Partinico, Sicily, where he founded a center of studies and initiatives for full employment. His legacy is still alive today with the "Center for creative development Danilo Dolci" which spreads the maieutic approach and welcomes youth and workers from all over Europe.
- Angela Zucconi (1914-2000), whose main contribution regards the pilot projects in Abruzzo developed from 1958 to 1962 with Adriano Olivetti: the UNRRA-CASAS (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration - Administrative Committee for Homeless Assistance); and the CEPAS, designed as an approach involving 12 small municipalities in a democratic and participatory process about adult education. The similarities with the organizing approach rely in the listening and engaging phase aiming at empowering the participants to create self-helping solutions, while promoting a bottom-up decision making approach.

In recent years, community organizing and other participatory approaches have gained prominence in Italy and the long history of isolated projects seems to have finally reached a turning point. Grassroots initiatives and community-led projects aim to empower individuals, foster social cohesion, and mobilize resources at the local level. Likewise, participatory budgeting, community-led urban regeneration, and cooperative enterprises are examples of initiatives that encourage active citizenship and collective decision-making.

Although several Italian experiences adopted some of the planks of the CO approach, the first fully-fledged CO initiative was started in Sicily in 2002 by a group of civil actors that decided to take collective action against the construction of an incinerator plant in the land of the Simeto River[9]. Their mobilization succeeded in blocking the project and went on to try to promote a new path for local development. In this context, a crucial role was played by the alliance with the University of Catania. Thanks to this latter's involvement, a community mapping process enabled local actors to share interests, plans, and shared challenges and to act on them collectively. This process involved both civic actors and institutional actors signing the Simeto River Pact in 2015 as a new form of collective and participative governance. A crucial element of the process was the funding of a Participative Presidium, a new institution that counts over 10 municipalities and associations

[9] Il Presidio Partecipativo: la storia di un territorio e il sogno di una comunità - ReCap Simeto - Reti Capacitanti nella Valle del fiume Simeto, https://www.esperienzeconilsud.it/recapsimeto/2021/01/31/il-presidio-partecipativo-la-storia-di-un-territorio-e-il-sogno-di-una-comunita/

(but also involving individual citizens), with the intent of developing local leadership through a bottom-up approach in order to give a central role to the people living in the valley working together with the local institutions to improve their living conditions. However, although the researchers were aware of the IAF tradition, this effort had a deeper connection with the ACORN network, which continuously supported and still advises the development of local actions (Interviewee #11).

Other initiatives in Italy can be found in Bologna and Brindisi. The first one is led by the Urban Innovation Foundation, through the economic and practical support of the University of Bologna and the local municipality, with the aim to promote innovative transformation of public spaces and economic and cultural innovation in urban contexts. Their methodology indirectly refers to CO practices, but it mostly focuses on civic imagination and proximity and research design[10]. The second initiative concerns the city of Brindisi and the attempt to create a "third way, to enable citizens in public life" through the creation of "Legami di comunità", a business organization (cooperative), with the support of the local administration and Catholic associations. This experience is much more grounded and broad-based and strongly focused on the issue of education and youth poverty[11].

A fully-fledged IAF-inspired CO association was instead created, in the late 2010s, in Rome, thanks to the effort of a Radical Party activist, Diego Galli. His first experiment of translation took place in the eastern periphery of Rome, and in 2017 an association, the Community Organizing Onlus (later renamed Community Organizing Italia), was founded. Since 2017 the organization has grown and explored different civic issues engaging schools, migrant organizations, churches and mosques (for further readings Cetraro et al, 2023). In 2019 another Italian pilot project, funded by a local bank foundation (Cassa di Risparmio di Torino), started to take form in the northern periphery of Turin as a research initiative of the University of Turin. As mentioned above, this latter experience, together with 12 interviews carried out among IAF-linked organizers in the US and western Europe, is the main primary source on which this paper is based.

The research project developed in Turin had a first focus on religious coexistence and quality of life in the northern periphery and its methodology followed the CO approach aiming at creating a pilot project able to translate its practices into the Italian local context. The first phase of the project was significantly supported by the collaboration with Diego Galli of Community Organizing Italia and Leo Penta of DICO, who led the first training on CO at the University of Turin, which involved students, local actors, researchers, and activists interested in exploring this approach.

The initiative also led to an extensive reflection on the organizing methodology and its application both in the national and European contexts. At the national level, multiple online meetings were held among experts and researchers involved in research and action projects and/or in CO projects to develop an Italian research center to address the Italian translation of the organizing methodology. The current paper is part of this effort.

7. Community Organizing from the US to Europe

This section of the paper will try to make a comparison between the practice of CO (after the IAF model) in the US and Europe, based on the above-mentioned interviews and the experience carried out during the CO project in the city of Turin.

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[10] Fondazione Innovazione Urbana - Progetti, https://www.fondazioneinnovazioneurbana.it/progetti
[11] Legami di Comunità, https://www.legamidicomunita-br.it/

Although most of this part will highlight the alleged differences between the two contexts, these latter, according to some of our interviewees, must not be overemphasized. Indeed, in their opinion, the IAF model of CO is based on some 'universals' that can be applied to every type of society, notwithstanding its organizational structure and cultural peculiarities. The organizers who support this idea particularly emphasize the crucial role of relationality, and the tool of 'relational meeting' or 'one-to-one', to forge social bonds and give rise to healthy and democratic community organizations. This is the opinion for example of interviewee #1, an American organizer now based in the UK, who contends that the relational meeting "might be related to some universal aspect of human life", and that the reception of this method in the US and the UK is similar. This opinion is shared by interviewees #2 and #3, both based in Germany; while interviewee #10, also based in the UK, emphasizes that the strategy (and particularly the degree of respect) you adopt when you approach a specific community can play a more relevant role in the success or failure of an organizing effort than cultural differences. On the other hand, interviewees #6, based in Germany, and #7, based in France, cast doubts on this optimistic view, saying that they encountered problems in applying the US-crafted relational approach to European societies.

The most significant differences - and potential problems - in adopting the IAF model of organizing in Europe that have emerged from our interviews, as well as from our experience during the development of a CO project in the northern Italian city of Turin, are however related to three domains that will be addressed in the following sub-paragraphs.

7.1 State and society

First, some of our interviewees highlighted that the European countries are often marked by a statist political culture, while in the US there allegedly is a more significant emphasis on civil society. This is also, in their opinion, related to a different perception of the public/private divide, with US people more used to public personal relationships (where they selectively decide what to tell or not to tell about their personal life), and Europeans more sharply distinguishing between a private domain ruled by intimacy and a public one ruled by formality.

These cultural and social differences might imply that people in European countries can be more difficult to organize, since according to our interviewees they are less used to grassroots action, and often expect the public authorities to take action on problems and/or be involved in trying to find a solution to a problem. This point is indeed not new, and the orientation of US citizens towards self-organization from below has been highlighted by the sociology and political science literature since Tocqueville's times (Tocqueville 1840). Indeed, this concept was highlighted by several of our interviewees. For example, interviewee #3, a senior organizer with experience both in the US and Europe, talked about a "deficit in the understanding of civil society" in Europe. In his opinion, European citizens tend to feel responsibility only towards the state rather than civil society, with a "lack of consciousness" about this latter and their own role in it. This point was echoed by interviewee #6, an organizer based in Germany, who also points out that in his country people "tend to wait for the intervention of the state", while in the US people "feel they can do better than the government". This point came indeed to the fore also during the CO project in Turin the authors of this paper were involved in: a very common remark from our interlocutors when the authors mentioned problems in the neighborhoods was indeed: "Why don't you tell the municipality?".

As for the alleged difficulty in organizing European citizens, interviewee #4, an organizer based in the Netherlands, lamented that "democratic self-awareness of the people is very low", and that they tend to "give up" if they don't see results in a short period of time. This point was also mirrored in the experience in Turin, where many people who looked initially very committed to the organizing initiative later became estranged from it because of the frustration engendered by the slow work of community building which must precede action in the IAF model of organizing.

Paradoxically, according to interviewees #6 and #9, the groups which would be readier to be organized are also the most marginalized from mainstream society, such as the migrant communities. However, this attitude goes together with critical points such as their frequent ties with the states of origin and their institution (embodied for example by community leaders, such as imams, who sometimes have little connection to their new homelands), and their internal divisions. Interviewee #6, in this case, referred specifically to the Turkish diaspora in Germany, which he defined as almost impossible to organize, considering the mutual distrust and vetoes among the different ethnic, religious, and political groups.

Of course, not all of Europe is the same, or can be treated as a single culture: for example, interviewee #10, an organizer and religious minister based in the UK, points out that his country probably is "in the middle between US and Europe" in terms of civic culture and civil society activism. Moreover, besides negative points, our interviewees also see some promising features of European societies that could instead facilitate the work of organizing. The most significant, according to interviewees #1 and 8, would be the proximity that people still experience in several European cities, where people live at walking distance from each other, and the feeling of community in the neighborhoods is in many cases stronger and more rooted than in the US. In their opinion, the fact that people are more used to meeting each other also outside institutional situations like church and school might therefore be a powerful facilitator of the organizing effort. About this point, interviewee #8, an organizer with experience both in Europe and the US, highlights the enormous "tradition of collective action" available in some European countries, with experiences ranging from the Middle Age communes to contemporary trade-unionism.

Another critical point to assess when comparing civil societies on the two shores of the Atlantic Ocean and their relation with the state is the fact that in Europe, more frequently than in the US, public authorities also often fund civil society initiatives, or even co-participate in them: a point not only quite evident in Turin, but also highlighted by several organizers we talked to in other European contexts, in Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. This role of public institutions in civic activation is highlighted for example by interviewee #4, who mentions the possibility of creating "a top-down thing to create something bottom-up". This possibility was very clear also in the Italian case: while we were developing our project in the northern periphery of Turin, a parallel effort aiming at creating local neighborhood councils was being developed 'from above' by an initiative of the municipality. In the meantime, many organizations which participated in our initiative were also funded, partially or completely, by public money (interviewee #4 describes a very similar situation in Amsterdam), and/or hosted by public institutions such as the facilities of the neighborhood councils (Consigli di Circoscrizione). As mentioned above, in Italy we also had the opportunity to observe experiences of civic activation directly led or at least supported by municipalities' initiatives, for example in Bologna and Brindisi. However, also according to interviewee #11, the most striking example of this phenomenon is the above-mentioned CO initiative in the area of the Simeto river, in Sicily. There, the collaboration between public authorities, the local universities, and civil society committees has ushered into the creation of a new public institution, a 'river contract' (Contratto di fiume) where the local municipalities were actively involved (Saija 2014 and 2016).

To sum up this point, according to both our observations and many of our interviewees, both the more statist European culture and the involvement of public institutions in the development of civic activism and local councils, often create a situation of proximity between public institutions and civil society organizations, which makes difficult for these latter to perceive public actors as antagonists (as shown in the following paragraph, this is also partly a consequence of different ideas of power and conflict in the US and Europe). In the end, after three years of experience with our project in Turin, this issue led us to put in question the appropriateness of the IAF methodology - and particularly the rigid 'wall of separation' it implies between public institutions and civic organizations - for European local contexts such as Italy and Germany, where public institutions are traditionally embedded in the fabric of social activism. Are such features of organizing really 'universal' and needed to carry out an effective civil society activation - an idea which the IAF people seem to support - or just a part of the US culture of organizing which must be revised to be applied to some European societies? This point (which, as shown above, is also a subject of discussion in the US) is surely open to further research.

7.2 Ideas of power and conceptions of politics (and conflict)

The different ideas of civil society and its relations with the state are also linked, according to some of our interviewees, to different conceptions of politics, power, and conflict. To begin with, they highlight that in Europe people allegedly have problems accepting the idea of a political activity that is not conveyed through institutional channels and, particularly, political parties. This point has twofold consequences. On the one hand, as highlighted by interviewee #1 (an organizer with experience both in the US and the UK), British people have problems in conceiving a political initiative that is not partisan. In his words, "when you talk about labour, they think about Labour". This situation often makes it very difficult to carry out a CO initiative with a non-partisan outlook in Europe: in Turin, we witnessed how political parties were deeply embedded in the fabric of organized civil society, where many activists had good party connections (indeed, it was not rare to find a former activist with a role in a party and/or a public administration - or vice versa); as a consequence, a number of them also made inquiries to try to understand what the political affiliation of our team was. Notwithstanding, the fact that the initiative was promoted by an actor perceived by many as 'neutral', such as the university, helped our team to be accepted by many as non-partisan. Other European organizers have instead made a different choice, by adopting an openly partisan outlook: it is the case for example of interviewee #7, based in France, who is convinced that "organizing should be associated with a left-wing ideology".

Probably also as a consequence of the above, another problem raised by our interlocutors is the fact that European people also seem to have problems in accepting discourses about social coalitions pursuing power for the sake of the community. Interviewee #6 indeed contends that while in the US prevails a 'neutral' idea of power, that can be used for good or bad purposes, in Europe there is often a negative conception of power, as something that corrupts 'good' civil society efforts. Therefore, in his opinion people are more inclined towards local improvement initiatives than towards getting power to make possible wider actions. For the same reason, they are allegedly also very reluctant to address conflict, while in the US, according to interviewee #6, "they know that conflict is necessary, but they also know how to de-escalate the conflict". Quite interestingly, he also highlights that there are different reasons why a local leader might not be at ease talking about power. For example, Turkish imams in Germany are officials of the Turkish state (which also provides for their salaries). As a consequence of this role, he maintains, they are very reluctant to address the issue of power.

Another issue related to the significant politicization of European civil societies is the fact that the organizations reportedly tend to be less ideologically neutral than in many US contexts. Indeed, as shown by our experience in Turin, and confirmed by many of our interlocutors, western European civic groups and associations - at least in the secular domain - are often marked by some type of left-wing orientation. Moreover, it is quite common that the groups which are more oriented towards organization and action are also, often, the most radical. As a consequence, their involvement can represent a big stake for an organizer willing to promote a broad-based organizing effort including people with different ideologies. Particularly, these groups can reject the inclusion of conservative people, and, particularly, of representatives of religious civil society.

7.3 Roles of religion

The different role of faith communities is indeed another factor which might complicate the application of the IAF model of organizing to European societies according to some of our interlocutors, also considering that Europe is significantly more secularized than the US (Berger, Davie and Fokas 2008): a point also explicitly acknowledged by our interviewees #2, 3, 4, 7 and 8. On the one hand, as explained for example by interviewee #2, based in Germany, this makes the success of a mainly congregation-based organizing effort more unlikely, considering that in most western European countries there is a significantly developed secular civil society. Moreover, as we witnessed very clearly during the organizing experience in Turin, secular actors are often marked by a degree of mistrust towards religious communities and organizations. Therefore, according to our experience, putting around the same table secular and religious civil society actors often requires a lot of patience and time in order to create trust relations, especially when moral and ethical issues come to the fore. This can lead to difficult choices, as explained for example by interviewee #7, based in France, who explains on this ground his decision not to collaborate with churches and other religious institutions, and to collaborate with religiously-inspired charities only insofar they don't explicitly perform worship services.

In relation to religion, we must also highlight that the religious landscape of several European countries, especially in Catholic-majority areas, is quite different from the pluralistic religious landscape of the US (on this point see Casanova 2007). Dealing with religious organizations in Europe often means dealing with powerful, rich, and deeply rooted institutions with strong ties to national identity and state institutions. In some cases, they are even funded by the state and/or taxpayers, which again raises the issue of the interdependence between the state and civil society (Madeley 2003).

According to our observations, and according to some of our interviewees, this situation is particularly complex in Catholic-majority countries, where organizers have to face a quasi-monopoly of the Catholic Church, which has developed its own network of civil society organizations (which can paradoxically be a problem both in case they decide not to participate in organizing initiatives, and in case they participate, since there is reportedly the risk that they can hegemonize the process). This creates a hierarchy problem, since involving local parishes often means getting the approval of the local Church authorities. Local priests are also often well entrenched in their neighborhoods, and - as explained by interviewee #5, based in Rome - can be reluctant to give up part of their authority to participate as peers to the organizing effort.

According to some of our interviewees, the less significant religious pluralism of some European societies can indeed be a significant issue for organizers. According to interviewee #10, "it is important to include people with different religious views. From the point of view of the religious institution there are very few places that invite religious groups that are both open and inclusive. Many of them have a world where social intention and

spirituality are disentangled. CO [can be considered] as a public expression of our faith. It allows us to show who we are, especially our values." Interviewee #12, also an organizer based in the UK, adds that "it's possible to benefit from other [faith] traditions, it's possible to respect them and it's possible to learn from each other and work together."

Finally, since - as explained above - the local European parishes/congregations often receive funds from national religious bodies, they are stronger and paradoxically less in need to participate in organizing than congregations based in the US, which often cannot rely on institutional funding. According to interviewees #1 and #8, however, considering the more significant geographical proximity of many European societies (already highlighted in sub-paragraph 1 of this section of the present paper), it is easier for religious ministers to get in touch with their parishioners and to play a direct role in the organizing effort.

8. Concluding Remarks

This paper has shown the development of the CO method (focusing particularly on the IAF version) from Saul Alinsky to the present day, and its spreading from Chicago to the rest of the US and, some decades later, to some European countries. As proven by the proliferation of CO initiatives and organizations in several countries of the old continent, this methodology of grassroots mobilization has become increasingly interesting for activists based in Europe: partly, as a consequence of the successes achieved by the IAF network in the US on issues such as housing and minimum wages; partly because of the need for new tools enhancing the European citizens' participation in a time of withdrawal of the welfare state and withering of political parties' structures on the ground.

The interviews to several CO practitioners, and the experience developed on the ground by the authors of the paper, have allowed them to put forward some hypotheses about translating and adapting the method from the US to European societies, to be tested by future research.

First, according to our own observations and to many of our interviewees, European people - particularly outside the Anglo-Saxon world - allegedly tend to have a different view of the role of the state and citizens' activism in civil society: which can make the development of stable and sound grassroots organizations more challenging. This leads to the hypothesis that CO in Europe needs to develop partly different ideas and tools to facilitate the involvement of European citizens, also in accordance to local traditions of mobilization; and to different models of funding, where dues from local organizations don't represent the major source.

This is also connected to reportedly different conceptions of power, which can create problems in conceiving an idea of political action pursued by non-partisan civic platforms separately from state institutions, and partisan logics alike. This puts forward the challenge of how to reframe the CO method to adapt it to contexts where the involvement of public institutions in civic efforts (also in terms of funding), and partisan logics alike are a stable feature of many societies. This might imply to give up the rigid 'wall of separation' - established by the IAF model of organizing - between the grassroots organizations and the public institutions and political parties (both in terms of funding and strategic planning)

Finally, the results of our research suggest that the different role of religious institutions and organizations, and the more secularized nature of many European societies, can put big stakes against the development of neighborhood organizations that can keep together religious communities and secular civil society groups. The

hypothesis, in this case, is that European organizers might need to partly give up the logic of the IAF model, heavily relying on faith-based efforts, to consider a different approach, more open to the thriving - but often not neutral in partisan terms - secular civil society.

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Interviewees List

1. Male, religious minister, former organizer, UK
2. Male, organizer, Berlin, Germany
3. Male, religious minister and organizer, Berlin, Germany
4. Male, organizer, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
5. Male, religious minister and organizer, Rome, Italy
6. Male, policy consultant and organizer, Berlin, Germany
7. Male, organizer, Paris, France
8. Male, researcher and organizer, Durham, UK
9. Female, organizer, Duisburg, Germany
10. Male, religious minister and organizer, UK
11. Female, researcher and organizer, Catania, Italy

12. Female, religious leader and organizer, London, UK

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Sara Fenoglio is Independent Researcher, junior researcher at the University of Turin from 2019 to 2022. Her research interests span from community organizing and development to civil society, social welfare policies, conflict analysis, and comparative politics.